

Southeast News

a publication of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

December '98 - January '99

CHRISTMAS HOPE

On the morning of November 29th, the sanctuary at First Congregational Church in Atlanta looked as it usually does: pulpit, piano, altar, organ. But slowly it began to fill up with color and light on this first Sunday of Advent. Church members brought in poinsettias and greens, candles and ornaments and a wreath, as we learned again about these rich symbols of Christmas. In the newly resplendent sanctuary, we sang carols and gave thanks for this most special season.

Two hours later, the sanctuary began to fill up with my friends. As my ordination service began, I looked out over the diverse crowd gathered: black and white, old and young; people from off the streets and out of seminaries; professors sitting next to former prisoners; refugees and writers, musicians and missionaries and ministers--all sharing this marvelous convergence of sacred moment and joyful celebration. I breathed a prayer of thanks for so many blessings.

Christmas is a time for counting blessings. It is also a time for remembering once again God's amazing choice to come among us as one of us--as a child, naked and vulnerable, turning all our expectations upside down. I offer you this prayer--part of my ordination Call to Worship--as my Christmas hope:

Precious Jesus--

*You who were born to a feeding trough
and made a childhood refugee;
who lived as a homeless friend to the outcasts
and were put to death as a criminal--
show us again, please, how to love
your sisters and brothers...
and ours.*

Rekindle our cold hearts with your love.

Warm our faint spirits with your courage.

*Enlist us in your conspiracy of compassion and justice,
toward a world in which the rich are put off their
thrones and the poor are exalted.*

*Amid all the silences and sufferings of this world--
in the face of all the hunger and
homelessness and hatred--*

*we pray that we might remember the good news
from the Gospel of John:*

*"The light shines in the darkness;
and the darkness does not overcome it."*

May this be our hope.

May this be our joy.

Amen.

--Joyce Hollyday



When the song of the angel is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:



To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among people,
To make music in the heart.



—Howard Thurman



CONFERENCE COMMUNICATIONS

The Conference Communications Committee (Joyce Hollyday, Timothy Downs, Gerri Ryons-Hudson, and Ken Mattern) met in October to review and make plans. Beginning in 1999, you will notice a few changes. Rather than mailing Southeast Perspective to clergy and lay leaders, and Southeast News to individuals and congregations, we will be sending one bi-monthly newsletter to the entire mailing list.

We hope in 1999 to feature more of our congregations, so that we can learn and be encouraged by one another's faithfulness. You will continue to see a pastoral letter from the Conference Minister, news of the staff, updates on the national United Church of Christ, and a calendar of upcoming events. Please let us know in the Conference office of your church's events and celebrations, as well as prayer concerns to be shared.

With the help of Ken Mattern, we hope to have the Southeast Conference website up and running in early 1999. We'll keep you posted.

A LETTER FROM THE CONFERENCE MINISTER

Dear Friends,

I write this letter on the threshold of a new year--a time of reflection and looking back, a time of hope and renewal as we look forward to 1999. Many of you know that the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ came into being on January 1, 1966, exactly 33 years ago. One hundred and twenty-seven congregations joined into this fellowship. One hundred and three were historically White Congregational-Christian congregations; 20 were historically Black Congregational churches; and four were historically of the Evangelical and Reformed traditions. Since that time, the Southeast Conference has been buffeted by the changes that have swept through the rural south and throughout our society, and has been affected by the declining demographics of mainline denominations. Today the Southeast Conference has 62 congregations scattered over a six-state area.

This might appear to be a bleak pattern of decline; yet this picture is not a new one in our region. In his book *Southern Congregational Churches*, Richard Taylor notes that in 1927 E.W. Butler gave an address about Congregational Methodist congregations. He noted that "from 1850 to 1890 they had no zeal for missions or Sunday schools or theological schools," and that by 1927 all of their churches were dying. He ended with these startling statistics: "One-half had no Sunday school, and 80% had church worship services only once a month and 90% collected no offering."

As I contemplate our circumstances, I could--like the prophet Nehemiah did over Jerusalem--survey the ruins, sit down, and weep. But after prayer, Nehemiah rose up and declared, "The hand of my God has been gracious to me." And later he proclaimed to his detractors, "So we rebuild the wall ... for the people had a mind to build" (Neh. 4:6b).

The purpose of this letter is to say that the changes that have moved through our denomination to bring us to this place were already in motion in the first part of the 20th century and have continued through today. Yet I find myself as we enter this New Year having a deep sense of pride in the strengths and gifts in many of our congregations. We have embarked on a commitment to revitalize the life of our local congregations, and we are beginning to develop a strategy for new church starts in strategic locations, relying on the tremendous gifts of ministry on our staff.

One of our pastors said to me recently, "Tim, just tell us where you need us so that we can be there for the building up of the United Church of Christ and the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus." These are the places where your energies and prayers are needed:

•**The Covenant for Renewal Program.** John Mingus has developed this program, training people to go out in teams of two to help our congregations discern their needs, develop mission statements, and make partnerships for transformation. If your congregation is ready to take a step toward renewal, please contact us so that we can begin to build with you.

•**The TAP Program (Theology Among the People).** Through this program Dick Sales is training people who are called to ministry, but who cannot move from the community in which they live. The TAP Program will be conducted in a number of locations throughout the Conference beginning in 1999. It is our hope that licensed ministers and others seeking ordination, who are unable to pursue a traditional course of theological study, will benefit from this training.

•**Rekindle the Gift.** Elizabeth Clement and Joyce Hollyday are directing this program, which will reach out to the Black Congregational AMA churches of the Southeast and Southern Conferences--to reclaim their stories, renew a relationship with the Conference, and move toward a grand gathering of the AMA family for fellowship and renewal (see article on page 7).

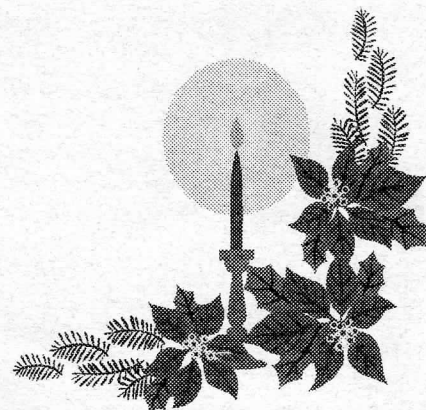
•**New Church Starts.** We are carefully rebuilding the foundation for a New Church Start strategy, working closely with the Board for Homeland Ministries. We currently have two projects under consideration. There are also congregations that are disaffected from their own traditions, which are exploring a relationship with us and the United Church of Christ.

In addition to these exciting initiatives, we continue to be present to our churches as our staff preach and teach, and provide leadership training and many other resources to our congregations. As surely as there are forces that have buffeted our churches, there are winds of renewal blowing through them.

As we enter 1999, I am confident that we, like Nehemiah, know that "the people have a mind to build." We invite you, dear friends, to be a part of this season of building. I wish for each of you the renewal that we know in Jesus Christ as we move forward into the New Year.

Peace,

Timothy C. Downs



ANNUAL MEETINGS OF THE ASSOCIATIONS

Georgia/South Carolina Association

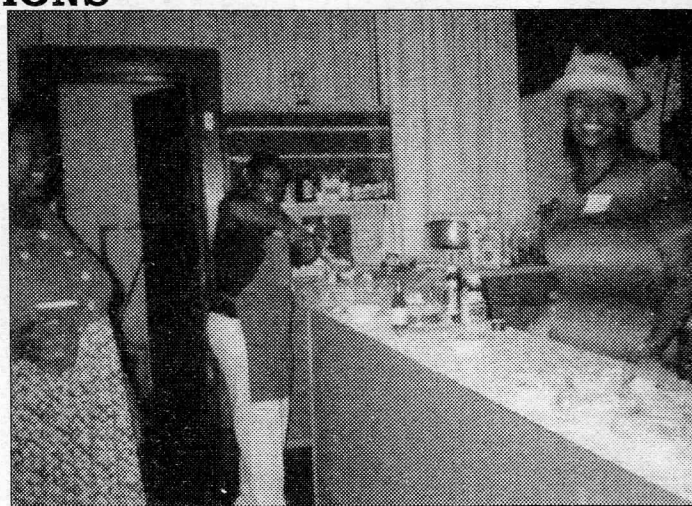
The Georgia/South Carolina Association held its Annual Meeting September 11-12 at Evergreen Congregational Church in Beachton, Ga. The Annual Meeting was marked by marvelous hospitality provided by the church, workshops led by the Conference staff, and numerous recognitions of people whose commitment has infused the life of the Association with vision and promise. The music was inspiring, and the new officers of the Association were installed in a closing ceremony. The following were elected to serve the Association as we go forward: Annette Nielsen, Moderator; Helen Pearson, Vice Moderator; Lisa Alston, Secretary; and James Loyless, Treasurer.

The theme of the gathering was "Witnessing in Troubled Times." The keynoter, Joyce Hollyday, reminded us with eloquence of Christians in other places and times who have passed through troubled times and given testimony that miracles can happen by the power of God, and that we in this time and place can be vessels for God's miracles. She told the story of encountering a young boy in South Africa in the shadowed and desperate days of apartheid. Joyce asked him, "Do you think your children will get to grow up without apartheid?" He pulled himself up to his full height and answered, "I will see to it." Here and now God will do a new thing; it will break forth because of those who by their vision, courage, and faith are vessels of God's renewing promise.



Alabama/ Tennessee Association

The meeting of the Alabama/Tennessee Association was held on September 18-19 in Chattanooga, Tenn. Rev. Tom Dipko, Executive Vice President of the Board for Homeland Ministries, was the keynoter. Tom reminded us that change is a constant throughout Christian history. Even as we in the United Church of Christ enter our reorganization and even as tumultuous times continue to break around us, this is indeed the story of Christendom. Tom reminded us that the *New Century Hymnal* was not the only hymnal published by our tradition that was greeted with controversy, and recounted the story of the introduction of the *Bay Colony Psalter* in the 17th century, which was greeted with cries of outrage and scandal. The delegates to the Alabama/Tennessee Association Annual Meeting were blessed by the hospitality of Pilgrim Congregational Church of Chattanooga. Elected and installed to office were the following: William Chew, Moderator; Milton Hurst, Vice Moderator; Kenneth Mattern, Secretary; and Edward Schneider, Treasurer.



Hospitality at Evergreen Congregational Church

East Alabama/West Georgia Association

The East Alabama/West Georgia Association gathered on October 17 at North Main Congregational Church in Roanoke, Ala., and shared in a wonderful and renewing fellowship. There were considerable conversations concerning the new Conference staffing, and the gifts and work of Associate Conference Minister Dick Sales in Alabama. Joyce Hollyday served as the keynoter and spoke on the theme of lifting our gratitude in prayer and praise before God. The inimitable Louise Cox reported on various mission projects undertaken by the Association, and regaled the assembly with stories of their good works through the Heifer Project, SIFAT, and their collection of clothing for people in Central America. A wonderful meal was prepared by the people of North Main Congregational Church, and the following were elected as officers of the Association: Arthur Dailey, Moderator; Louise Cox, Vice Moderator; Betty Moon, Secretary; and Donald Harmon, Treasurer.

South Alabama/Northwest Florida Association

The South Alabama/Northwest Florida Association met at Antioch Congregational Church, Andalusia, Ala. The Planning Committee had put together an excellent program focused on the family, and intended to have the Annual Meeting at the Blue Lake United Methodist Retreat Center on October 3. But due to heavy rains and flooding in South Alabama, the meeting was postponed to November 7 and the original program had to be canceled. There was nonetheless a marvelous time of fellowship. The following people were elected to serve in the coming year: Lena Paul, Christian Education; Marvin Brand, Church and Ministry; Robert Foreman, Outreach; Ruseda Baker, Women In Church and Society; Jim Courtney, Church Development; and Jeannie Gibson, Social Justice.

There were expressions of appreciation to many for their service, not least of whom is Dick Sales, for his ministries and presence in South Alabama.



MARIE'S STORY

by Trudy Braun



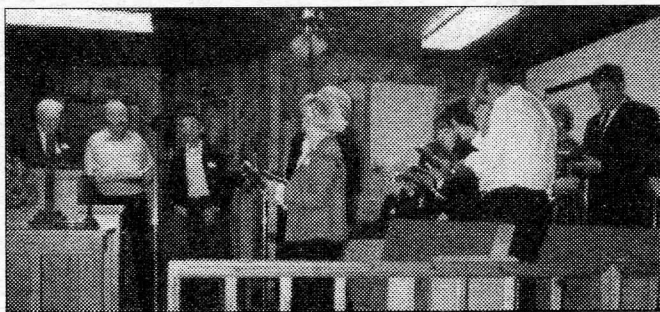
In April, a team of eight people from Pleasant Hill Community Church went to Perry, Ga., at the request of Anne Ariail, Coordinator of Disaster Relief for the Southeast Conference, to help build a new church. The Oak Grove CME Church had been burned to the ground by white arsonists. At the end of our work week, Martha Rabert and I asked to see the site of the burned church, so Marie Johnson kindly agreed to take us there. This is her story.

Marie is one of the older members of the Oak Grove CME Church and has been a part of the church since she was born. The church has been her anchor in life, a center of celebration, consolation, and praise. As Marie drove, she pointed out the landmarks of the journey--the place where the school had been and a few miles farther the place where she grew up. She walked the distance every day with other children until they stopped attending school. She lived with her aunt and uncle, and her uncle told her she couldn't go to school anymore because he didn't want her to walk alone. From then on, she worked full-time, cleaning houses, hoeing corn and peanuts, picking cotton, cooking and later caring for her own children. Some years ago, she was seriously injured in a car accident and was put on disability, but she remains active in the church, serving as the head usher (the one who sees to all the details).

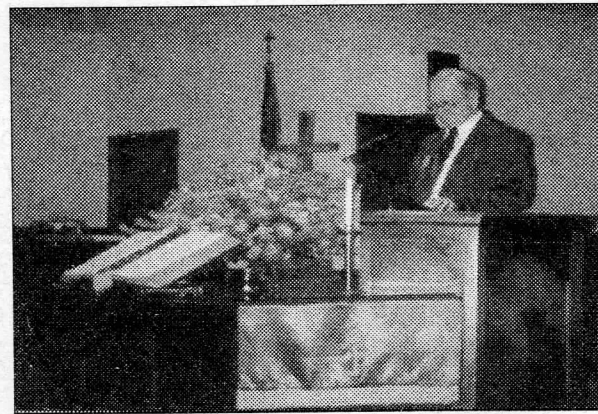
On the paved road is a weathered sign marking the dirt road to the old church. Only old grave stones remain on the site, one marked with the birth date 1865, some with barely discernible inscriptions. Some of the markers are gone, but the families know where their kin are buried. Tall trees encircle the place where the church had been, and one could imagine a building filled with people singing, or a picnic on the grounds. Wild flowers now grow where the church once stood. It must have been a pleasant place.

From the time she was a little girl, Marie rarely missed a service at the church. She worried about the safety of the church, isolated as it was. On the morning after the fire, a neighbor took her to see the remains; only part of the brick walls were standing. She wept, but she couldn't talk. She felt a tightness in her chest and pain in her arms that took her breath away. Weeks later, medical tests showed that she had had a heart attack...a broken heart and a heart attack.

With tears in her eyes, Marie told us that, many years ago, when she learned that fires sometimes strike churches, she began praying that God would take care of Oak Grove Church. She prayed that mice would not chew the electric wiring, and that lightning would not strike. "But," she said, her voice cracking, "I never thought that men would set fire to the church."



*Gospel Songfest at the
South Alabama/Northwest Florida Association
Annual Meeting*



*Rev. Arthur Dailey moderates the
East Alabama/West Georgia Association
Annual Meeting*

TRANSITIONS

William Lloyd was installed as a licensed minister at Trinity UCC, Hampton, Ga., on September 20.

Rev. James Schwarzlose was installed on November 1 at Jones Chapel United Congregational Christian Church, Woodbury, Ga.

Ricky Cummings has been licensed to preach at Corinth Christian Church, Wadley, Ala.

Rev. Kathi Martin, First Immanuel Church, Decatur, Ga., was granted privilege of call.

Rev. George Bennett has been granted ministerial standing in the Georgia-South Carolina Association.

S. Chrystal Cook and **Amy Cantrell** have been licensed to serve at Pilgrimage UCC, Marietta, Ga.

Laura Landrum and **Leslie Brogan** were granted in-care status in the Georgia-South Carolina Association.

David Speno is ordainable, pending a call.

Joyce Hollyday was ordained to ministry and installed as Associate Conference Minister on November 29.

Rev. James Norris will be leaving United Church of Huntsville, Ala., at the end of January to establish a pastoral counseling center.

We mourn the passing of **Rev. Wesley W. Martin**, who pastored the Fredonia Congregational Church in Barnsville, Ga., for 21 years.

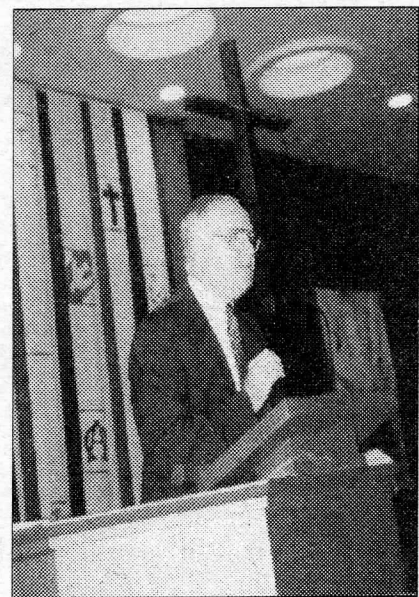
PROGRAM PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING A SUCCESS

Fifteen people gathered for the annual Program Planning Committee of the Southeast Conference, held at First Congregational Church, Birmingham, Ala., on November 14. Those invited included the Board of Directors, and all members of Commissions and Executive Committees of the Associations. Conversation was lively. We reviewed the breadth and depth of the program that has taken place in the life of the Southeast Conference this last year. We agreed to adopt the following Mission Statement for our work: "To develop events, programs, and communications that foster the growth of relationship and a sense of community between and within congregations, Associations, the Southeast Conference, and the United Church of Christ at the national setting for the advancement of the realm of God." To that end we agreed to explore developing some of the following opportunities:

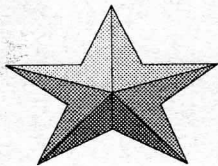
- A retreat for clergy twice a year.
- Workshop for Students-In-Care, assisting them with placement and profile preparation.
- Emphasis on the needs of clergy in specialized ministries.
- Strengthening the spiritual life of spiritual leaders through retreats.
- Compensation guidelines developed and distributed by Annual Meeting.
- Explore mutual recognition of ministries under the Formula of Agreement signed by the United Church of Christ, Presbyterian Church USA, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, and the Reformed Church of America, and mutual recognition of ministries between the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ.
- Continue operation of the Scholarship Committee and program.
- Continue training the Crisis Response Teams.
- Continue to promote the work of the TAP (Theology Among the People) Program to equip lay ministers (licensed and commissioned).
- Promote Partners in Education Program in the Southeast Conference.
- Move and organize the Resource Room.

- Provide opportunities for youth programming through Mini-Camp, Annual Meeting, Confirmation Retreat, and Camping Program.
- Promote Regional Women's Retreat.
- Continue to seek a Project Coordinator for the Retreat Center.
- Call a pastor to the South DeKalb New Church Start.
- Do grant applications for new church starts in Birmingham and LaGrange.
- Continue to promote the Covenant for Renewal.
- Provide leadership development training and resources to the Associations.
- Continue to develop the spiritual and prayer life of the Board as we gather.

The staff commits itself to a staff meeting at which these various program priorities will be assigned to staff and organized by Commission.



*Rev. Tom Dipko addresses the
Alabama/Tennessee Association Annual Meeting*



HIGHLIGHTS OF BOARD ACTIONS

At its meetings on August 22 and November 13, the Board of Directors of the Conference discussed the following issues and decisions:

- * General Synod delegates for 1999 are Gary Myers, Dorothy Gager, and Terrance Hardman, with David Mann as an alternate.
- * The Board reviewed and affirmed the "Rekindle the Gift" project and partnership.
- * We are exploring the possibility of a mission partnership with Penn Northeast Conference.
- * Elizabeth Clement will be traveling to South Africa in December to help us take our next step in exploring a mission partnership with the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa.
- * The following people have been nominated to national positions in the reorganized United Church of Christ from Southeast Conference: Holly Nelson, Executive Council; Terry Davis, Wider Church Ministries; Jerry Plante, Justice and Witness; Gary Myers, Local Church Ministry.
- * The Board reviewed with enthusiasm the report of an audit of the Conference books for 1997 and agreed to authorize an audit each year. We made note that the "Make A Difference" national campaign has returned a total of \$77,000 to the Conference for our work.
- * The Board reviewed the recommendations of the Personnel Committee and the Finance Committee and affirmed the excellent work of each of the members of our staff commending them for their commitment. They authorized an 8% raise for Gerri Ryons-Hudson, the Administrative Assistant; Adrienne Laraway, the Bookkeeper; and Tim Downs, the Conference Minister; and agreed to increase our contribution to the pension of Joyce Hollyday by 7% in 1999 so that she is receiving a full pension contribution of 14%.
- * The positions occupied by Joyce Hollyday and Dick Sales have been renamed Associate Conference Minister, and the position occupied by John Mingus is renamed Interim Associate Conference Minister.
- * The following people were asked to serve on the Annual Meeting Planning Committee for 1999: Marion Rogers, Connie Moorer, Marta Morrison, and Ginny Nixon. Others will be added.

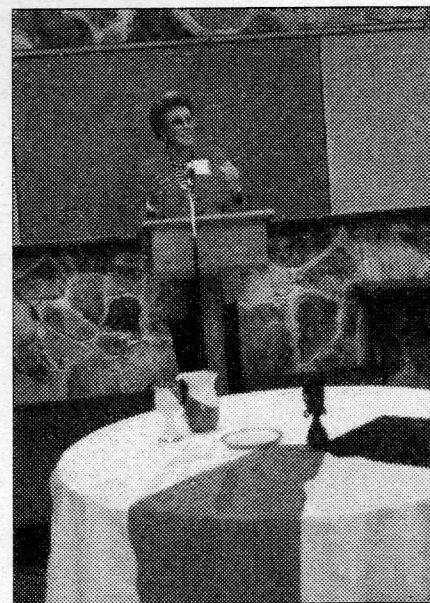


GLAD TO BE SISTERS!

What a weekend it was! Women from all over the Southeast Conference converged on the Shocco Springs Conference Center in Talladega, Ala., November 20-22. We brought gifts of worship and mission, of music and storytelling and puppetry. Joyce Hollyday brought the keynote address and Sunday morning sermon, reminding us of our biblical sisters, inspiring us with their courage and compassion.

On Saturday afternoon we took an unforgettable journey to Talladega College, to view the *Amistad* mural and remember the *Amistad* event as part of our UCC history. We grieved that time in our nation's history when human beings were enslaved, and we acknowledged the exclusion and intolerance that still exist today. But for our weekend, the centerpiece was a "welcome table," where ALL are invited to be at home.

The weekend was full of gifts and graces. We were inspired by the workshops and uplifted by the Talladega College Choir; we laughed at puppets, gave generously to the Women's Mite, and shared communion and tears. From the opening vespers to the closing hymn, we celebrated our friendship and connections as sisters in Christ.



*Dr. Annie Neal invites sisters
to the "welcome table"*



BELVIDERE CHURCH CELEBRATES ITS 125th ANNIVERSARY

by Nancy Carter

In July 1873, several Swiss-German families, united by their Reformed faith, common language, and cultural heritage, joined together to form a congregation in Belvidere, Tenn. One hundred twenty-five years and three name changes later, First United Church, UCC, Belvidere, still thrives in the small, southern middle Tennessee community, recognized for its hospitality, generosity, and service to the Lord. Many current members are descendants of the original founding families.

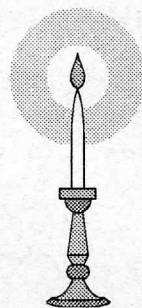
The anniversary celebration began in December 1997 with an 1873-style Christmas service, remembering our simple German beginnings. Live greenery, paper chains, and popcorn strings decorated the church. The altar was adorned with a German Bible and a wooden cross, rather than the usual, more modern brass. The service included scripture readings, traditional chants, and carols sung in Latin, German, and English.

The commemoration continued in 1998 with monthly celebrations, including a Boy Scout reunion, a Mother-Daughter program, and a visit by Tennessee's Poet Laureate, Margaret (Maggi) Britton Vaughn. Anniversary projects included a monument/sculpture by local artist and church member Anna Kathryn Anderson Holley, a "Heritage Trail" honoring and memorializing present and former members and pastors, a cookbook, a commemorative throw blanket, and a photographic history of the church.

The celebration culminated in July with a weekend of fellowship and reminiscing. United Church of Christ President Dr. Paul Sherry and Conference Minister Dr. Timothy Downs were honored guests at a forum on the UCC. After the Sunday morning worship service, we ate dinner under two large tents, dedicated the Heritage Trail and its Sun Dial centerpiece, and sealed a Time Capsule to be opened in 2073 on the church's 200th anniversary.

RESOURCE CENTER TO MOVE

At long last the Resource Center has a new home. For two years we have been looking for a congregation that would provide a home to our Conference Resource Center and help us set into place a system by which people can borrow resources by mail. In December the Resource Center will be moving to First Congregational Church, Atlanta, and in January and February it will be organized and set up, a coordinator appointed, and resources for church school, program development, and strengthening the church will be made available. Look for continuing news.



REKINDLE THE GIFT: A NEW INITIATIVE IN THE SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE

"I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of fear, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline."

(2 Tim. 1:6)

Borrowing from 2 Timothy, we have named the theme of what was born as "The AMA Project"; it is "Rekindle the Gift." As Tim Downs has traveled around the Conference and visited our congregations, he noted that many of our 18 historically Black Congregationalist AMA congregations are doing ministry in deep isolation. In response to this, "Rekindle the Gift" is a project focused on reaching out to our AMA congregations, identifying the rich history that flows through their lives, and reclaiming the many stories of courage, mission, and ministry that comprise that history. We will also provide preaching and teaching, leadership development and programmatic resources to help each congregation that wishes to gain the tools it needs to strengthen and renew its ministries. The "Rekindle the Gift" project will be directed by Elizabeth Clement and Joyce Hollyday. In addition to national funding from the Board for Homeland Ministries, we celebrate that three other Conferences are partners in the project, providing not only financial support, but opportunities for program, mission partnership, and a celebration of our historic connections. Our partner Conferences are the Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Southern Conferences, where 24 churches of the AMA tradition are located.

CONFERENCE CLIPS

Conference Minister **Timothy C. Downs** is available for preaching in our congregations. Please contact him at the Conference office (800-807-1993).

The titles of **Rev. Dick Sales** and **Rev. Joyce Hollyday** have been changed to Associate Conference Minister. **Rev. John Mingus** is serving as Interim Associate Conference Minister. (The new titles fit so much better on the stationery).

We give thanks for the good health of **Rev. David Menchhofer**, who survived a serious automobile accident.

Please let us know at the Conference office about celebrations, sorrows, and prayer concerns, so that we can share them through the newsletter (800-807-1993).



Worship at the Georgia/ South Carolina Association Annual Meeting

Covenant for Renewal

The Covenant for Renewal Team has been meeting for several months. On October 23-25, two members of the team facilitated a retreat for First Congregational Christian Church, Birmingham (see following article). The weekend culminated in the formulation of a Mission Statement. The success of this first endeavor is a great encouragement to all involved in the Covenant for Renewal process. If you would like your congregation to be involved, please contact Rev. John Mingus (423-698-5682).

First Congregational Christian Church Has Fall Retreat

by Laura P. Sterling

Nestled in 200 wooded acres, just 30 minutes south of Birmingham, Twin Pines Conference Center in Sterrett, Ala., was the perfect setting for Birmingham's First Congregational Christian Church's Fall Retreat, October 23-25, 1998. The Retreat Planning Committee, along with Pastor Rodney Franklin, seemingly ordered beautiful autumn weather, enthusiastic members eager to rediscover the purpose and vision of the church, and energetic and motivated facilitators. God is good. He blessed us with a full wish list.

The theme, "The 3 R's--Rediscovery, Renewal, and Rededication of the First Church Vision," was the focus and challenge which led the group in developing the Church's Mission Statement. How fortunate we were to have had Ms. Joyce Hollyday, Conference Associate for Spiritual Development and Community Building, and the Rev. Vant Hardaway, Pastor of First United Church of Christ, Sweetwater, Ala., to be spiritual guides through this journey. Conference Minister Rev. Timothy Downs was also present for dinner and the opening session.

On Friday evening, after members and guests found their rooms in log houses that were situated in a natural setting next to the lake, they registered, enjoyed a country-cooked meal and got down to serious business. Ms. Hollyday and the Rev. Hardaway set the course with icebreakers and prodded reminiscences of "earliest memories of church." And what a response! From "boy meets girl" to "Sunday school fun and fellowship" to "the bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church" to "sitting straight and tall in pretty clothes," the group's enthusiasm was fired up. The facilitators had established a relaxed atmosphere for beginning the odyssey and for targeting the theme.

Saturday morning, after rising early, watching the fog lift from the lake and indulging in a hearty cholesterol-laden breakfast buffet, small Bible study groups settled down to reading specific scriptures which gave a clear view of our role in God's church. The full group then reconvened to summarize the central messages, discuss the church's strengths and weaknesses, and reflect on each person's views of "when church was really church." Finally, after a lively, stimulating and thoughtful interchange of ideas fueled by the enthusiasm of the facilitators, all felt spiritually motivated to write, "Our mission is" We were definitely on the road to Covenant Renewal.

After dinner, children, teens and adults gathered for a wrap-up session of singing, fun, fellowship and evening prayer. The teens entertained us with an original puppet show. Everyone was invigorated as all shared laughter and embraces and felt God's love through our caring and sharing of His gifts and blessings. Sunday's culminating worship service fittingly brought to a close a shared time and an experience in which all committed themselves to being a Christian fellowship in covenant with God and witnesses to His love and mercy.

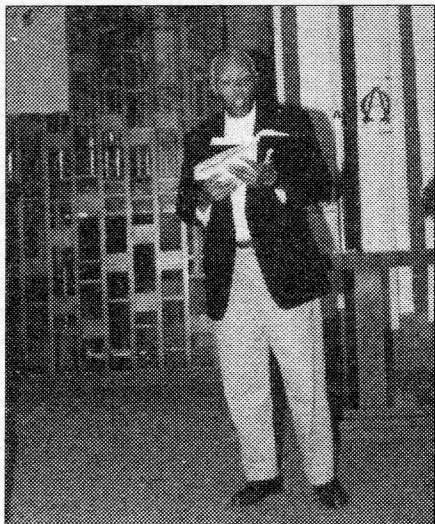


The Planning Committee for the Women's Retreat

CLERGY RETREAT A TIME OF FELLOWSHIP AND RENEWAL

Clergy from across the Southeast Conference gathered October 14-15 at Congregational Christian United Church of Christ in Lanett, Ala. John Thomas, Assistant to the President for Ecumenical Concerns of the UCC, facilitated our time together with competence and grace. He began by posing two questions: 1) How do we express unity without uniformity? and 2) How do we honor diversity that does not divide (through either conflict or indifference)? The conversation was animated as we explored historical creeds of the church and tried to discern the essentials of faith in our own time.

Grounding our two days together was rich fellowship, expressed both in worship and a delightful night of karaoke (Everybody except Milton Hurst--keep your day jobs). Many thanks to the Lanett church for abundant hospitality and great Southern barbecue. All present agreed that we need more such retreats in the future.



Rev. Milton Hurst leads the singing at the Alabama/Tennessee Association Annual Meeting

Keeping You Posted News from the UCC Office of Communications

Full Communion

History was made when four major U.S. Protestant churches celebrated their new relationship of "full communion" with a gala worship service in Chicago on October 4. More than 1,500 members from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in America, and United Church of Christ shared Holy Communion together for the first time. Rev. Paul Sherry, president of the UCC, said that full communion is "God's gift to us," one we approach with "anticipation and excitement."

Equality in Communications

In 1967 Rev. Everett C. Parker successfully petitioned the Federal Communications Commission to apply equal employment rules to broadcasters. Today, trends have been away from affirmative action, and a recent federal court decision declared that stations are not bound by equal employment statutes.

However, the FCC has decided to uphold its regulations requiring broadcasters to continue to recruit women and persons of color when jobs are open. Rev. Parker, now the retired head of the UCC Office of Communications, says that the FCC "has courageously taken a stand for justice and equality....which is in direct line with our own goal of achieving full participation of women and minorities in all phases of the church and society."

Forgive Them Their Debts

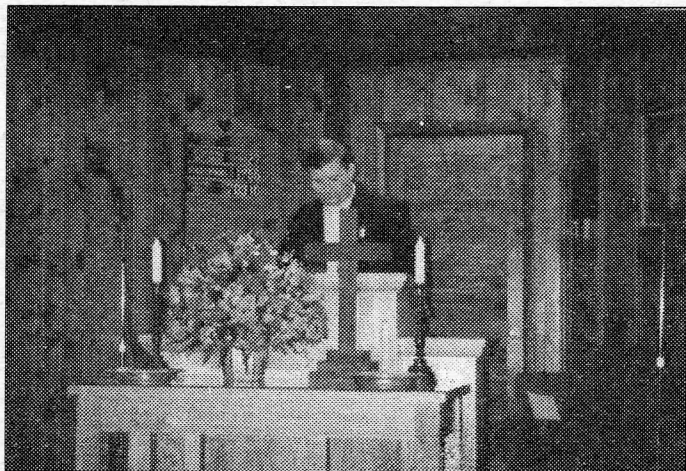
The Common Global Ministries Board of the UCC/Disciples of Christ says Hurricane Mitch has so devastated Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador that they cannot pay back huge loans made by the international community and institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Mitch did an estimated \$4 billion in damage in the three Central American countries. Nicaragua, for example, says it will take \$1.5 billion to restore its infrastructure, but it is burdened with \$3.8 billion in debt. Its gross national product in 1995 (the last year for which figures are available) was only \$1.575 billion. The Common Board is asking that the debts of these nations be forgiven.

Speaking of Money...

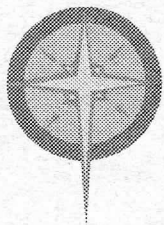
The Lilly Foundation has awarded \$5,140,480 to four UCC-related seminaries, with the aim of strengthening parish ministry by attracting outstanding students into local church ministry and reaching out to high school students to consider entering the ministry. The seminaries are Andover-Newton, Chicago, Eden, and Lancaster.

INTERFAITH RELATIONS

The Office of Global Ministries is searching for the names and contacts of people and groups who are, or have been, actively involved in Interfaith Relations-meeting, working with, or dialoguing with persons of other faith groups. Please contact Patti Meyer, Global Ministries Intern, P.O. Box 1986, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1986; fax 317-635-4323; e-mail pmeyer1086@aol.com.



Rev. Woody Clark moderates the South Alabama/ Northwest Florida Association Annual Meeting



CALENDAR

December

24-25 Conference Office closed for Christmas

January

- 1 Conference Office closed for New Years
- 8-9 Board of Directors meeting (Huntsville, Ala.)
- 15-16 GA/SC Association Leadership Retreat
- 23 Crisis Response Team meeting (Chattanooga, Tenn.)

UPDATE ON THE ALLEN RETREAT CENTER PROGRESS

Filled with hope and good intentions, the Allen Retreat Center Planning Committee was confident in the spring that we would have a project manager to help direct our building and that we would have a pavilion built on the site of the Retreat Center land in LaFayette, Ala. In early June, we discovered that we did not have a project manager, and have now put the plans that have been drawn up out for bid. The first two bids we received on plans for the pavilion were \$85,000 and \$100,000. The Retreat Center project currently has about \$30,000 in the bank. After considerable reflection, the Retreat Center Committee has regrouped and is continuing to look for a project manager who will be able to oversee the solicitation of donated materials, volunteer work groups, and work plans to help us to reduce the cost of building our pavilion. Keep your eyes open for further news, as we continue to work.



Worship at the East Alabama/ West Georgia Association Annual Meeting

CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM TRAINING AND ACTIVITIES CONTINUE

Under the capable direction of Dorothy Gager with Tim Downs, the Conference Crisis Response Team training has made available to each of our Church and Ministry Committees people who have been trained to intervene in churches that are struggling with issues of clergy sexual misconduct and other crises. In the last year and a half there have been two training events. A system of intervention with trained teams has been put into place. We are looking for opportunities to conduct workshops for clergy and laity who have a concern about ministerial ethics and sexual misconduct. Please call the Conference Office if you have an interest!

COMING UP

Rev. Tim Morrison is organizing a **Work-Visit to Ghana**, January 30-February 13, 1999. The primary purpose of the trip is to provide a short-term mission field experience with a longstanding partner church of the United Church of Christ. Worship, work, visits to mission projects, and exposure to all aspects of Ghanaian life and culture are part of the experience. Contact Tim Morrison at 770-971-0007; Pilgrimage Church UCC, 3755 Sandy Plains Road, Marietta, GA 30066; e-mail tmorrison@secucc.org.

The congregation of Oak Grove Congregational Christian Church, Pine Mountain, Ga., is offering an open invitation to all members of the Southeast Conference to join in the celebration of their Centennial. The festivities will begin the weekend of Sunday, May 16, 1999. Come to an **"Old-Fashioned Sunday Meeting"** at the edge of beautiful Callaway Gardens! Contact Mary Thompson at 706-663-2672 (after 4 p.m.); 325 Tucker Road, Pine Mountain, GA 31822.

Journey of Hope...From Violence to Healing is an educational and awareness tour that travels around the country spreading the message of forgiveness. It is led by murder victims' family members, who share their stories about the process of healing through reconciliation. The Journey of Hope will be in Tennessee, beginning in Nashville on April 11 and then traveling across the state. To assist this effort or book a speaking engagement in your church, please contact Joseph Ingle: 615-321-4114; 1210 Jefferson St., Suite 200, Nashville, TN 37208.

"Called to Care: Claiming our Christian Vocation" is the theme of the 4th annual UCC Health and Human Service Convocation. The theme grows out of the church's vision of health--characterized by wholeness of body, mind, and spirit--and care through mutual vulnerability. The convocation, which is open to people across the UCC, will be held in Atlanta, March 4-7, 1999. Contact Barbara Baylor at 216-736-3272.

Consultation XXIV on Parish Ministry is entitled **"Women and Men: Sharing Holy Ground."** It will take place January 4-8, 1999, in Miami Beach, Florida. Contact Rev. Robert S. Alward: 941-642-7514; P.O. Box 1578, Marco Island, FL 34146-1578; e-mail: Consultation24@hotmail.com.

The 1999 Ecumenical Church Educators Event will be held February 3-6, 1999, in Chicago. The theme is **"God's People Transformed for the 21st Century."** Contact Nan Zoller: 615-274-6163; e-mail: nzolr@aol.com.



FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Church Handbook

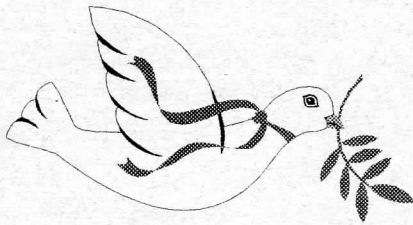
The Massachusetts Conference of the UCC has published a handbook for local church treasurers and trustees. It covers such topics as incorporation, tax exemption, internal audits, housing allowances, and UCC benefit plans. The handbooks are available for \$7 each through the Massachusetts Conference website (www.macucc.org); or call Dawn Hammond at 508-875-5233.

Contest

The Historical Council of United Church of Christ announces its Fifth Annual UCC Historical Essay Competition. The author of the best essay written on some aspect of the history of the UCC and/or any of its antecedent traditions will be awarded \$200. Entries must be received by May 1, 1999. For more information, contact The Archivist, United Church of Christ, 700 Prospect Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115-1100.

Just Peace Awards

General Synod 22 will present Just Peace Awards to one person and one church. The primary criterion is involvement in witness for justice and peace. If you have suggestions for nominations, please contact Tim Downs at the Conference office.



***How beautiful upon the
mountains
are the feet of the messenger
who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation.***

ISAIAH 52:7

**The staff of the Southeast Conference
wishes you peace in the New Year.**

Tim, Gerri, Adrienne, Joyce, John & Dick

**Southeast Conference
of the
United Church of Christ
756 W. Peachtree Street
Atlanta, GA 30308**

